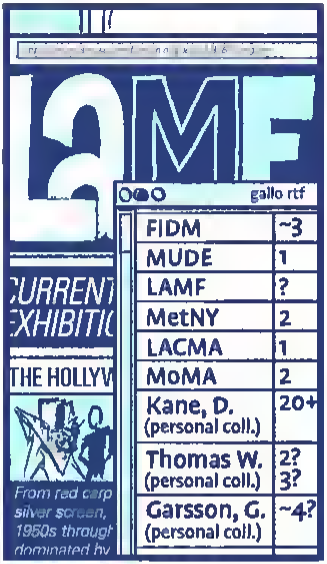
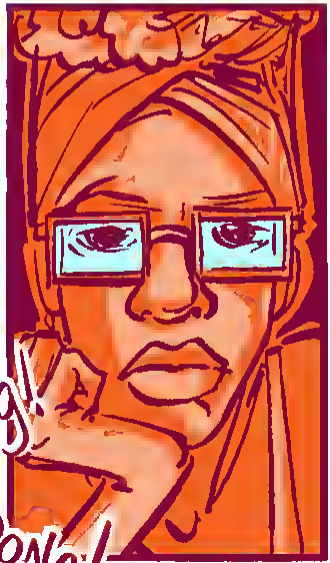




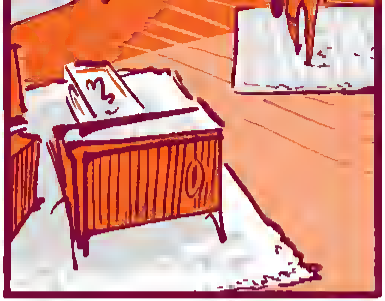
Dingdong!
Dingdong!

Knock knock!

AUTHORIZED ENTRY
Shit.

Carina?
You awake?

We have a meeting, did you forget?

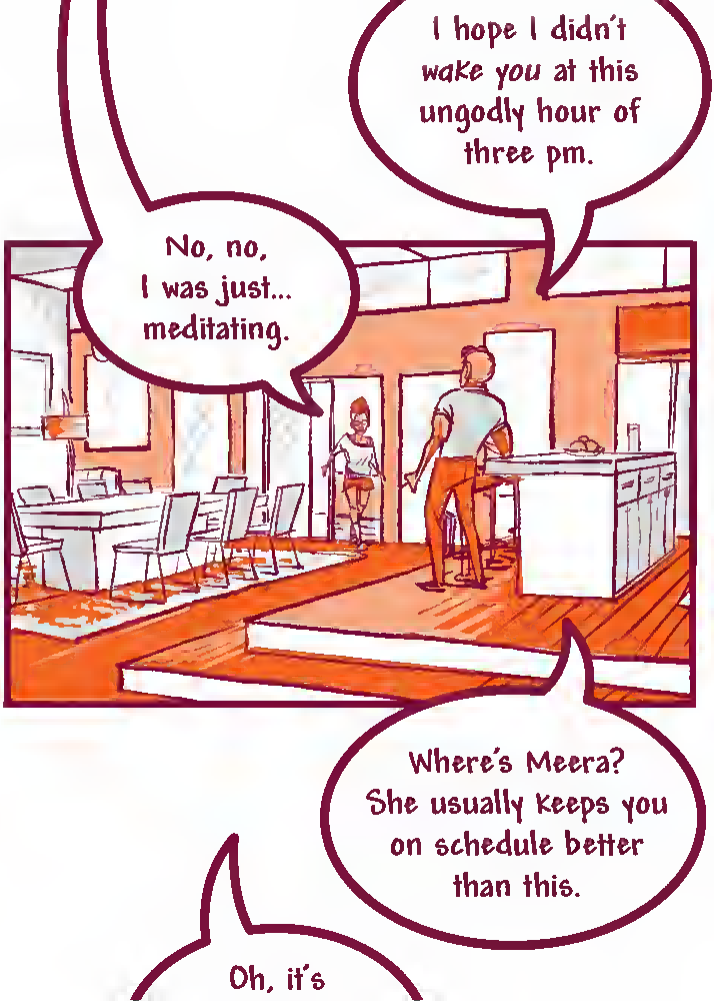


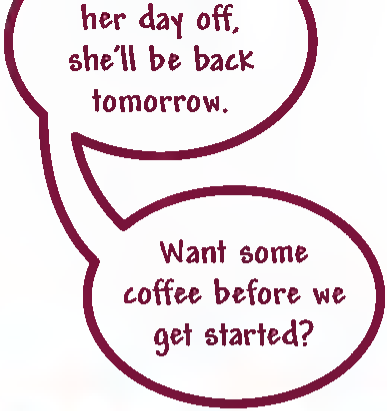
Carina?

Javier, hi! Sorry, I didn't hear you.

Have you been waiting long?

There you are!


I hope I didn't wake you at this ungodly hour of three pm.
No, no, I was just... meditating.
Where's Meera? She usually keeps you on schedule better than this.
Oh, it's



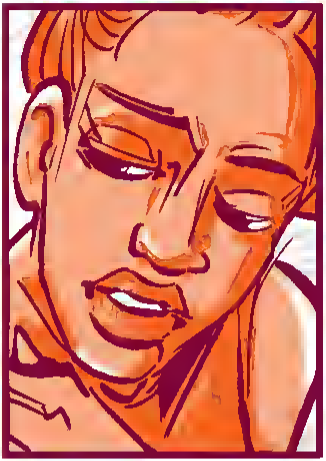
POWER BALLAD

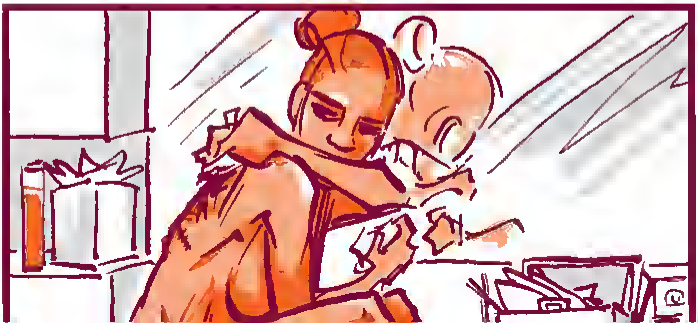
CHAPTER FIVE

I just wanted to touch base on where we're at with tour scheduling. We wanna do this right.

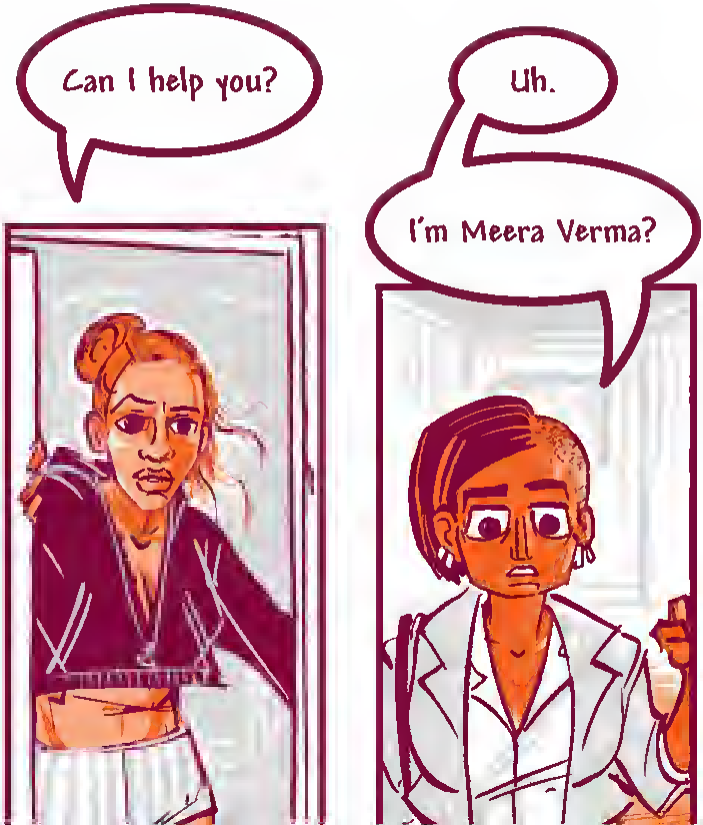
This album launch, this tour—it's the culmination of two years of hard work on your part.
It's something you should be proud of.
I am.

(TWO YEARS EARLIER)





DingdonG!
DingDonG!
The hell...?


Can I help you?
Uh.
I'm Meera Verma?

...I'm here for my interview?
But that's not until eleven.
...

...It's eleven *now*, isn't it.

11:08, actually.

I was all prepared to start apologizing and blaming traffic—there was some huge crime scene diversion across half of La Cienega.

Right. Come in! Make yourself comfortable. I'm going to...put some clothes on.

—which is when we realize that she's locked us in.
No!
I shit you not. And none of us had her number, so we were actually stuck there.
Oh my God. What did you do??

Well, first we took a vote on whether to break a window and escape,

but we were all too scared we'd have to pay for the damage, so we ended up just spending the night there.

NO.

YUP.

When the manager showed up in the morning, we were all sleeping on the floor using like, jumbo bags of cotton

balls for pillows.

That was baby high-school-Meera's introduction to the workforce: my parents trying to have my manager arrested for kidnapping.

Well, you seem sane and capable.
As I'm sure Javier told you, the position's through his management company.
So he'll actually be the one writing the checks.
Would you be able to start next week?

Uh, yeah! Yeah, I can make that work.

...So, you are hiring me, right now, yes? That's what's happening?

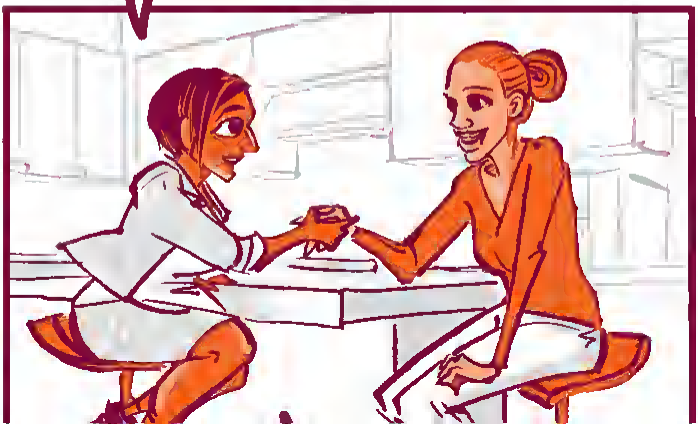
I sincerely and solemnly extend an offer of employment as my personal assistant.

Occasional overtime is expected

Occasional overtime is expected, and flexibility and availability are key, but time off will be accommodated wherever possible.

And I promise never to kidnap you and make you sleep on cotton balls.

Sold!



Or done, or accepted, or whatever. Yes.

Great! I'll let Javier know. He'll get in touch with you about payroll, contracts, NDAs, and all that.

Oh man, I was so nervous about this.

My girlfriend, Bette, had to give me a pep talk in the parking lot to even

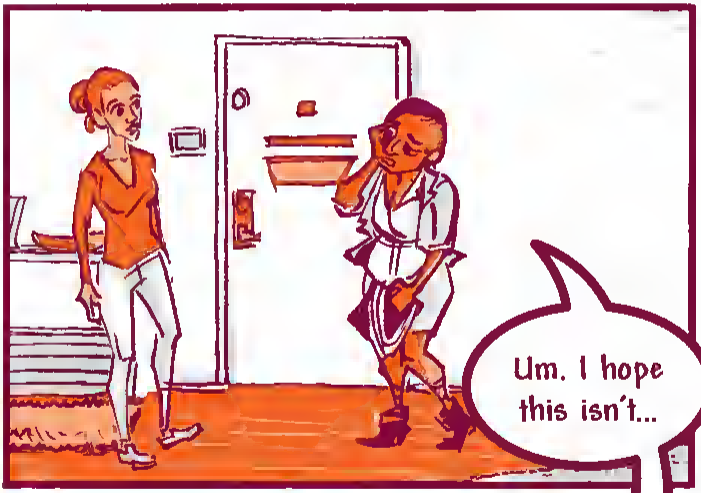
get me up here.

I was so *positive* I was going to come off like a dumbass.

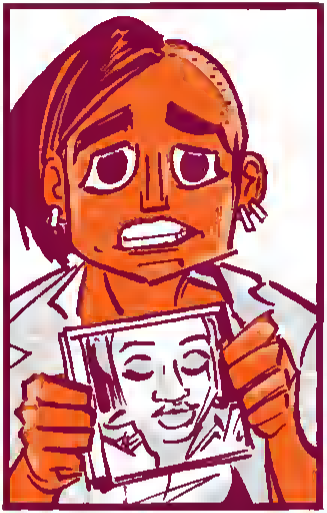
No, you're great.
And you answering the door in your underwear helped a lot.

Like, at least I showed up to the meeting with clothes on, you know?

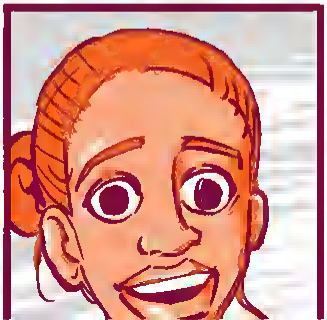
Ouch!



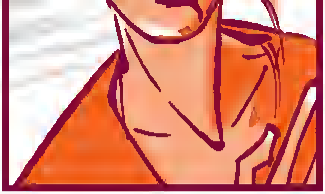
but...



...my girlfriend was hoping you'd sign your new CD for her?



Of course!



You scared me—
you were so serious, it sounded like you were leading up to asking for a *lock of hair* or *fingernail clippings* or something.

Oh God, I'm awkward.
You said her name's Bette?
Yeah, B-E-T-T-E.

It really is a great album, though.
Honestly, I'm so sick of it at this point.
Y'Know— done, moved on, already working on the next one
Yeah? How's that

how's that going?

Ehhhhh. I've been having some trouble coming up with ideas.

Or, not *ideas*, but like, *GOOD* ideas.

Well, I'm sure you'll figure something out, and it'll be totally amazing.

Haha, thanks.

And *thank you* for this—this is about to become one of her most prized possessions, seriously.

...

...

I should—
Right, sorry, I'm—here, let me get the...

@SCNLALIVE

Reports coming in from multiple Los Angeles neighborhoods of public assaults by an individual in mask, body armor. **bit.lu/kuyfk**

@suuzee_cue

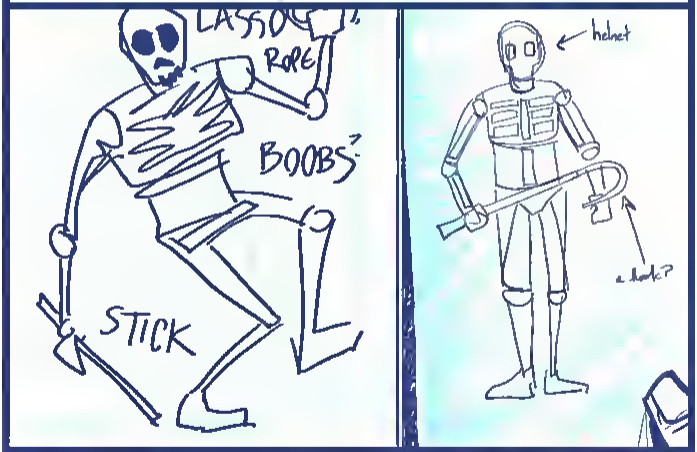
that skeleton thing is totally real!!!!! my brother's friend said he saw it like, JUMPING past his 4th floor window in WeHo!!! D:

@duograzie

Swear to fuck I saw that thing last night in Long Beach. **#SkeletonSpotting**

@amysaidso

LMFAOOOOOOOO have u seen the police's "artist rendering"??
"based on witness accounts" im sobbing



@slackerbear

Seriously, how the hell does no one have a photo of this guy yet?

@GOSS_Daily

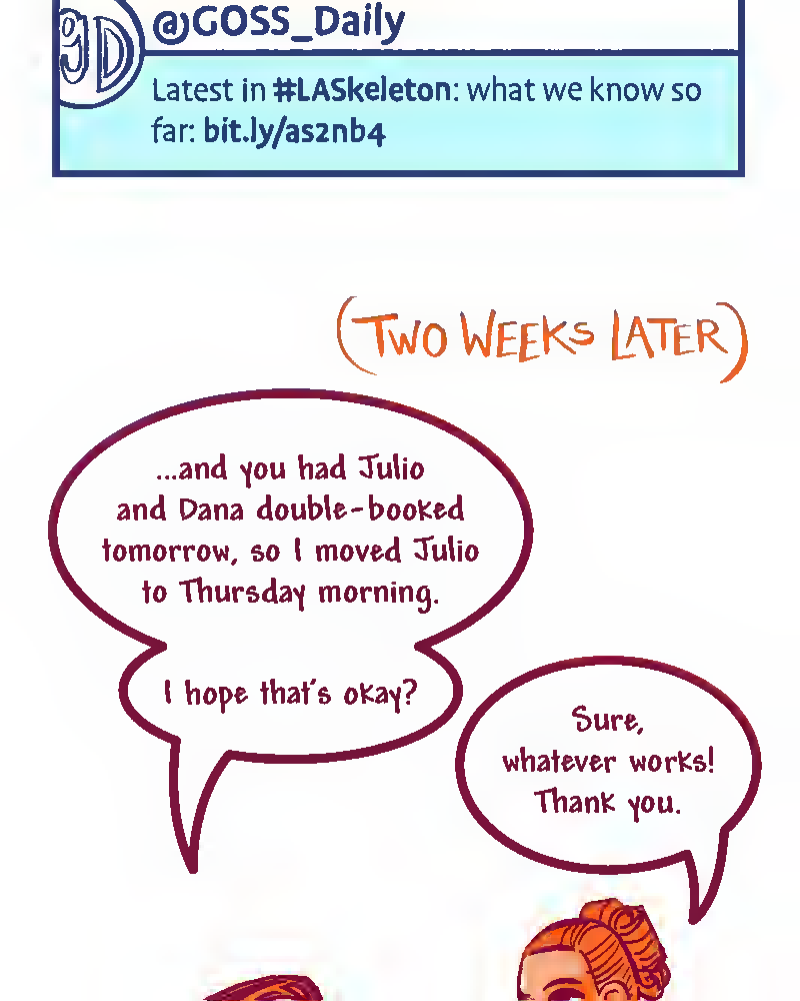
Latest in **#LASkeleton**: what we know so far: **bit.ly/as2nb4**

(TWO WEEKS LATER)

...and you had Julio and Dana double-booked tomorrow, so I moved Julio to Thursday morning.

I hope that's okay?

Sure, whatever works! Thank you.



@PCoastJrnl

The Skeleton Is Just A Symptom: Our Society Is the Disease | Pacific Coastal Journal **pcjr.nl/shstx7m**

@everyskyline_

stoked that LA has its own cryptid now. this is some old school jersey devil shit. BIGFOOT! haha

@lanabread

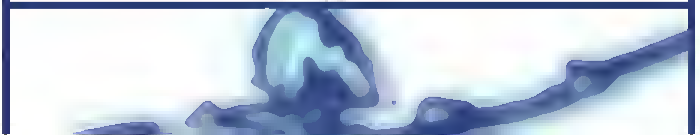
Hey, everybody hanging out in **#SkeletonSpotting**! We built a map to croudsource the data, spread the word! **—> skeletontracking.com**

@kolllman

yo I saw skelly in burbank last night.

@SCNLALIVE

#BREAKING: First witness photograph of the mysterious "Skeleton" **bit.ly/snt5hd352**



(THREE WEEKS LATER)

The driver's picking you up at

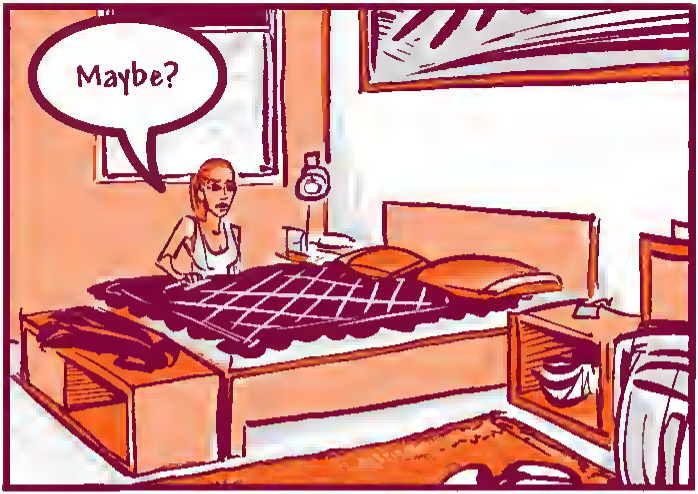
the front entrance at 5:15.
That's the latest you can leave and still make your flight. You got it?
Yup.
EXIT

Repeat it back to me.
Downstairs at 5:15.
You'd better be. Javier *screamed* at me the last time I let you miss your plane.
Oh, there you are. You okay?

Did the maid move something?

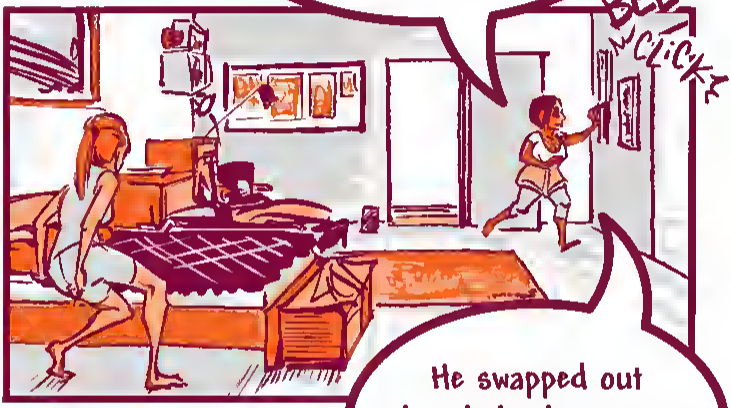
Christ, I hope not.
No, I just can't find... something.

Oh.
It isn't a... skeleton-patterned bodysuit, is it?

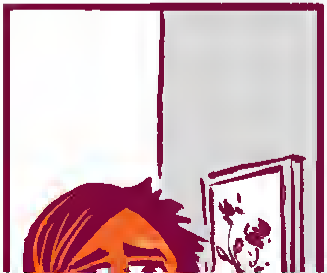


Okay, so—don't be mad, but I noticed a couple days ago that some of the armor panels were a little cracked.

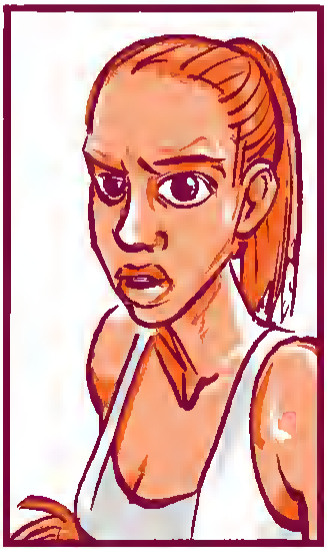
So I took it to my shoe guy and told him it was a costume for ComiCon.



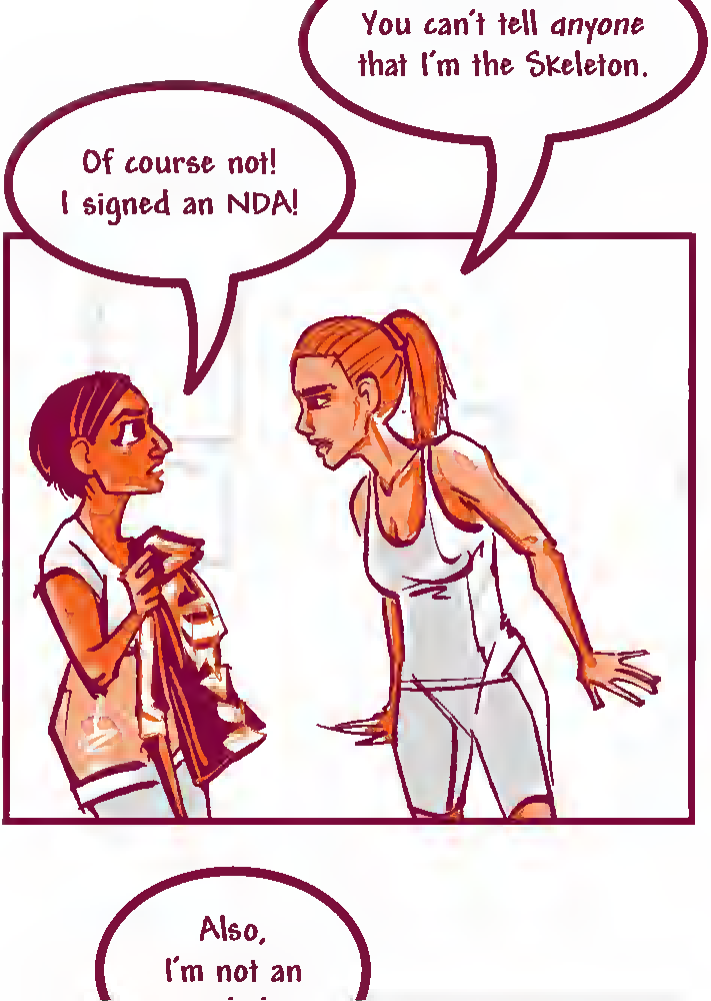
He swapped out the whole chest piece for like sixty bucks.



Look—good as new!



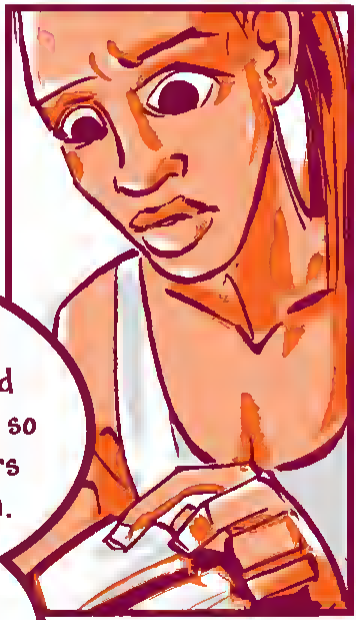
Meera.


You can't tell anyone that I'm the Skeleton.
Of course not! I signed an NDA!
Also, I'm not an

I can't believe you were running around fighting crime with *cracked* armor.

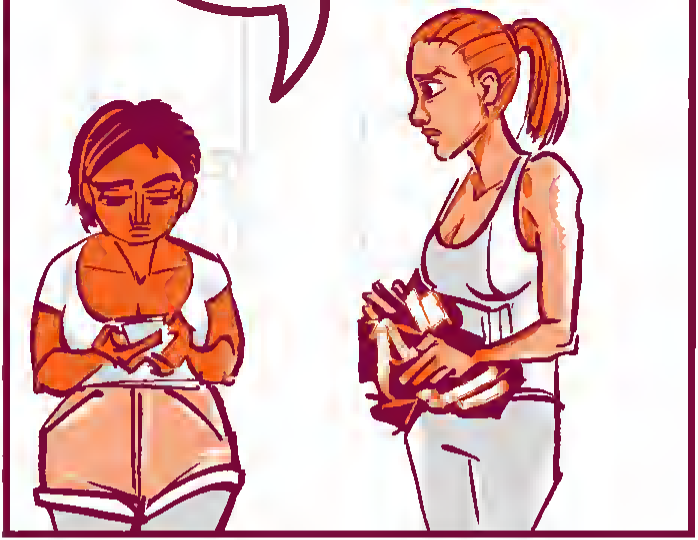
When I saw them talking about that armed robbery online, I almost

had a heart attack.



Anyway, I found a supplier for Kevlar and some YouTube tutorials, so I'll be able to do repairs in-house from now on.

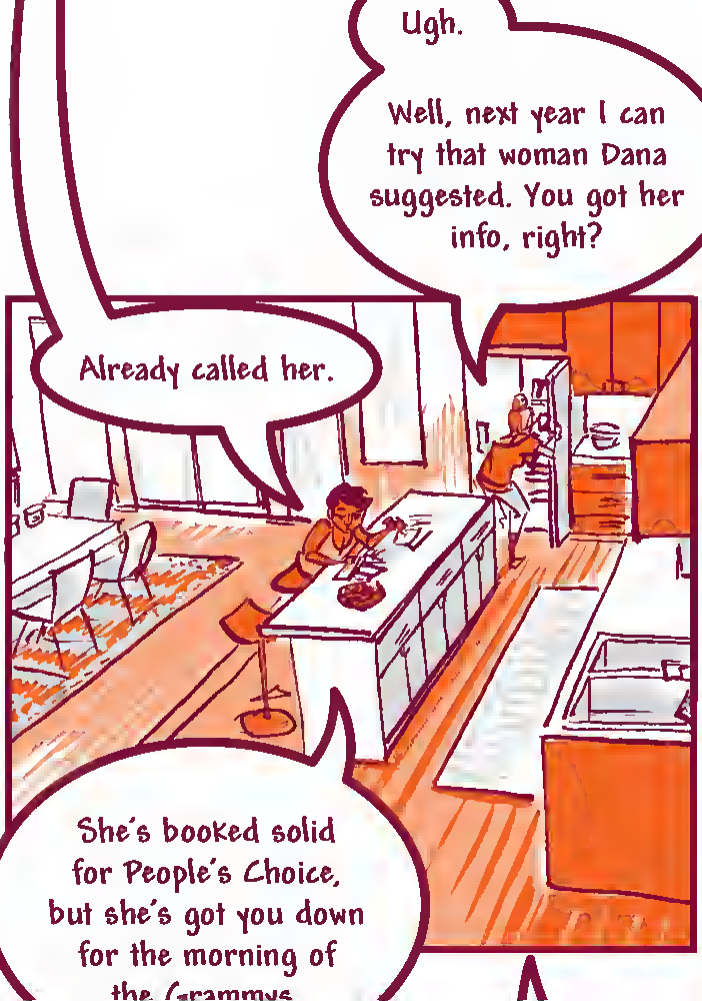
But also try ducking, maybe?



Ooof!
Thank you.
No one else knows.

(A COUPLE MONTHS LATER)

...which is hilarious, considering what they did to your face last time you went in.


Ugh.
Well, next year I can try that woman Dana suggested. You got her info, right?
Already called her.
She's booked solid for People's Choice, but she's got you down for the morning of the Grammys

the Grammys.

Cool.

Oh! By the way, the LA Theatre gave me a couple comp tickets to that silent film screening next week.

Do you want them? You and Bette could go, there'll probably be an open bar.

Might be fun.

Oh. Uh, actually... Bette and I broke up.

Oh.
I'm so sorry,
I didn't—
No, no, it's
not a big deal.
Mutual, good
terms, still friends,
all that.

Oh.
Well, then.

I mean, if you *want*, maybe you and *I* could—

—and anyway I've started seeing this girl Lauren...
—go togeth. Lauren!
Cool!
Is she nice?
Meh, so-so.

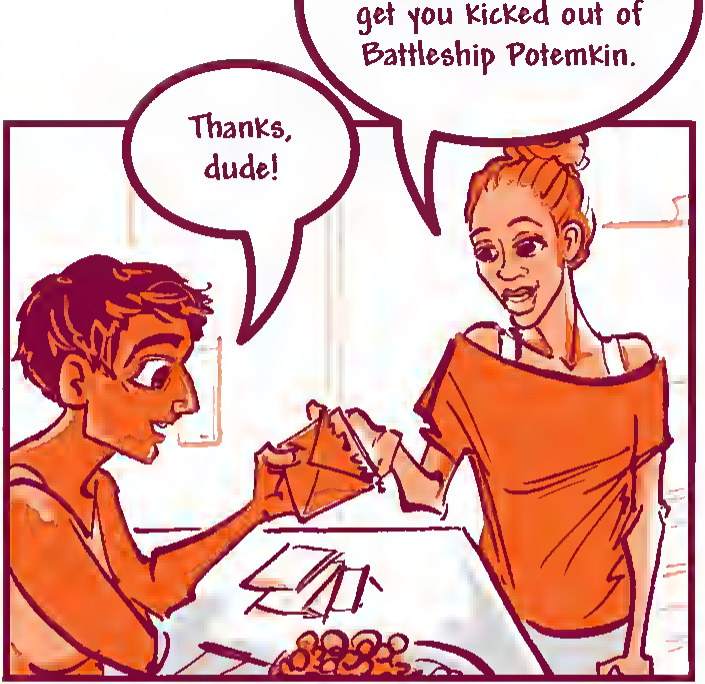
She's a yoga instructor in Silver Lake.

On our first date, she got down on the floor of the restaurant to prove she could put her legs behind her head.

Not gonna lie, it was pretty hot, but we were also asked to leave before we even got the ramen we'd ordered.

Ah.

Well, here— maybe Lauren can


get you kicked out of Battleship Potemkin.
Thanks, dude!

To be continued

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